Radio eye, audio vision and the freeing of the feature
in post war German and Australian radio

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Abstract

The paper draws on the ‘feature’ in the radio histories of Australia and West-Germany in the immediate post war period. This emerging radio form was inspired by BBC traditions and served as an innovative possibility to acoustically explore the world, the nation and ideas. We deal especially with two outstanding feature productions of this time: Ernst Schnabel’s Der 29. Januar 1947 (Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk/NWDR, May 1947) and D.G. Bridson’s Australian Rhapsody (ABC/BBC Aug 1948/Jan 1949). Acknowledging these promising attempts, the BBC chose to adapt and air both features soon after their first broadcasts. Schnabel’s and Bridson’s radio journeys marked a period of new journalistic and artistic means of expression within the feature form and stimulated many successors. The features made at NWDR from these experiments also became the foundation for one of the strongest cultures of the ‘feature’ and radio documentary in the world, a tradition continuing today to influence this most ‘free’ of all radio forms.

Our research is based on the emerging field of ‘entangled’ and ‘transnational’ media history. The study combines two countries which were far apart from one another at this time, and the radio they broadcast was unknown to each other or previously diametrically opposed. But, through post war BBC intervention and influence, and later a revitalized German vision for the radio, the public broadcasting institutions of each meet and become newly entangled. Through a new critical resounding of these distinct but related works, through this meeting of North and South – and actually three traditions, British, German and Australian – we speak more widely to the neglected critical and aesthetic history of this non-fiction yet poetical form, and offer new insights to these ‘audio-visionary’ moments in radio and public broadcasting.

Bio: Dr Virginia Madsen
Dr Madsen is Director of the Centre for Media History at Macquarie University, Sydney. She also leads the radio strand for MMCCS Dept. Madsen has published widely in the field of radio studies and is an established radio producer whose works have been broadcast in Europe, USA and Australia. Her research interests span the history of public broadcasting in audio media; radio’s documentary forms, traditions and developments; sound and radio production in all aspects; auditory and sound culture studies; new audio media, podcasting and the audio arts. Currently she has two major research projects underway: a history of the Australian public broadcaster’s ‘ideas network’, Radio National, an ARC Discovery Project; and she is also writing an international account of the ‘documentary imagination’ in radio from the 1920s to the present.
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Dr Hans-Ulrich Wagner is a Senior Researcher at the Hans-Bredow-Institute for Media Research in Hamburg and director of the 'Research Centre Media History', a cooperative project of the Universitaet Hamburg and the Hans-Bredow-Institute. Several research projects have been undertaken at this Research Centre. He is co-founder of the research network ‘Entangled Media Histories’ (EMHiS) with colleagues at Lund University and Bournemouth University and he heads – together with Virginia Madsen – the collaborative project ‘Transnational Media Histories’, a joint programme with the Centre for Media History at Macquarie University, Sydney. His research interests include radio history with several publications on radio plays, features and programming in the post war period. He has been working as a member of various juries, e.g. ‘Prize for Radio Plays. Prize for Radio Arts’. For more information see https://www.hans-bredow-institut.de/en/staff/hans-ulrich-wagner.